AN EVALUATION OF THE HABERMAN URBAN TEACHER SELECTION INTERVIEW IN RURAL SCHOOL SETTINGS

By

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Kathy Pillow-Price

102 pages May 2003

This study examined the use of the Urban Teacher Selection Interview in Rural school settings.

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ABSTRACT

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Rural schools, as a subject has not been adequately researched. Many studies on rural schools compare the rural setting to urban settings because the two face similar challenges of having high numbers of students enrolled that live in poverty. One researcher, Martin Haberman, has developed an interview and pre-screener process for urban school settings called the Urban Teacher Selection Interview (UTSI) by analyzing the attributes and behaviors of successful practicing urban teachers.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the pre-screener and interview devised by Haberman for urban settings could be statistically validated if used in the rural persistent poverty (RPP) school setting. This study had two primary objectives. The first was to identify characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors that are common to effective teachers in RPP schools. The second objective of this study was to determine if the Haberman interview validated on urban populations could generalize to RPP populations.

For this study, one hundred and fifty participants teaching in RPP schools were asked to complete the pre-screener designed by Haberman. The pre-screener is intended to be used to predict whether a participant would be able to

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pass the Urban Teacher Selection Interview. Ninety-two pre-screeners were returned for scoring. Twenty-one teachers were then selected and given the in person interview. Findings indicated that the UTSI does not statistically validate when used in the rural setting, but that the instrument might be useful in further research on providing a description of effective rural teachers. The interview process also revealed differences between teachers who passed the interview and those who failed it when looking at the additional qualitative findings.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In September 1998, the National Education Association Research Division (NEA, 1998) published a report that contained a comparative analysis on the status of education in rural and urban settings. The report is based mainly on data from national research studies conducted by federal agencies. The report's findings were that while approximately 40 percent of American public school students are in rural areas, their schools are smaller; and they are offering fewer services than other schools. Teachers in rural areas compared to teachers in urban areas tend to be less well-educated, less experienced, younger, and less likely to belong to a minority group. Teachers in rural districts spend more time with students both at school and outside of school hours, have lower incomes, and are less likely to receive health insurance. Rural districts are more likely to have inadequate buildings and unsatisfactory environmental conditions than urban schools, and rural districts also report lower rates of Internet access and telecommunications use.

In a 1994 report on rural youth in America, Harold Hodgkinson maintained that "most Americans have not been informed that as a youth policy issue, persistent rural poverty is a major problem" (p. ii). Children living in rural areas are poorer than children who live in non-rural regions including inner cities. Hodgkinson contends that Americans are not aware of this because, "There are no crowds of rural poor youth" (Hodgkinson, 1994). While American examples of urban poverty are relatively easy to find in mass and are frequently broadcast

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via the media, the low-density populations of the rural poor are often less conspicuous and seldom publicized.

Hodgkinson's research was an effort to "underscore the fact that rural poverty is not urban poverty in a different setting" (p. 2). Rural poverty is harder to escape than urban poverty. By reason of geographic differences, the ability to access necessary services is also impaired. An example is that rural children have less access to conventional child-care facilities because there are not enough children per square mile to justify the facility. The report indicates that "rural poverty is widely dispersed over a broad geographic area, making social service delivery expensive, as more time is taken between stops in low density areas" (p. 9). The report also points out that poor rural blacks stay in poverty for ten years or longer than poor urban blacks. A high percentage of the rural poor work at least part time, and 62 percent of poor rural households are living in two-parent family homes where it is normal for both parents to work. However, since wages are low, "rural families that depend entirely on earned income are poorer than those receiving public assistance" (p. 11). Rural residents are also less reliant on federal welfare programs than their urban counterparts.

Concerning children, Hodgkinson reports that poor rural children are more likely to stay poor for extended periods and are more likely to suffer from malnutrition. Unlike young children raised in a city, resources that would help rural children escape poverty are rare. These children are also the least likely to have health insurance with one in every six completely uninsured.

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In rural schools, these children have teachers and administrators who are not paid well and some have no benefits. Yet, these teachers are responsible for more subjects and preparations than their urban counterparts. Hodgkinson states that "the tax base in many rural counties is not sufficient to provide even adequate, much less excellent schools." (p. 18) His report extends the findings to note that in the past, rural students have done less well and attended college in proportionately fewer numbers.

Perhaps the biggest problem facing rural districts is their lack of funding which is almost 18 percent lower than that of urban districts. As these schools are faced with poverty, limited resources, and geographic isolation, many of America's rural schools struggle to prepare their students for the challenges of a modern society as noted by more than one national report (Kitchell, 1994).

Scholars increasingly agree that having an effective or competent teacher is vital to a child's learning process. This is particularly critical in both urban and rural settings; however, research suggests that those students who may have the greatest need for the best teachers are typically taught by the least qualified teachers (Viadero, 2000). Today, research is confirming what many have believed all along: a skilled teacher can make an enormous difference in how well students learn (Wenglinsky, 2002). What research has not yet established conclusively is a verifiable delineation of characteristics that define excellent or competent teaching. The definitions of "excellent" and "competent" have not always been thought out carefully in relation to teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

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Nonetheless, there has been an ongoing effort by researchers to identify effective teachers. Barr (1929) summarized "a statement of the minimum essentials of teaching success," in which he included ability to stimulate interest, attention to pupils while reciting, and among other things well-developed assignments. In conclusion, Barr found no critically significant differences in the teaching of good and poor teachers. Good (1979) pointed to methodological issues and defined teacher effectiveness as, "the ability of a classroom teacher to produce higher than predicted gains on standardized achievement tests" (p. 53). Good concluded that management skills and direct instruction are important factors when looking at effectiveness. Other researchers such as Ornstein (1982) and Goodlad (1990) have linked teacher effectiveness to district student-teacher ratios, administrative ratios, staff qualifications, and the improvement of colleges of education. However, these studies along with others, focus on teacher qualities in general and not on urban, rural, or other poverty populations.

Williams (1999) noted that, "One researcher, Haberman, (1995a), developed an interview process that purports to identify those characteristics necessary for effective urban teachers. Students of effective urban teachers, according to Haberman, learn a great deal as measured by standardized tests and other means. From an analysis of attributes and behaviors of successful practicing urban teachers, Haberman identified seven verifiable dimensions of effective urban teaching that can be identified through an interview process" (p.4).

Those dimensions are:

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1. Persistence - Which refers to the ability of a teacher to continually seek answers to problems in creative ways.
2. Protecting Learners and Learning - A commitment to protecting students' learning or the student's right to learn even in situations where it violates school rules or other norms. It shows that an effective teacher is willing to protect and support student learning.
3. Generalizations: Putting Ideas into Practice - An ability to make application of generalizations concerning teaching, learning, and development in a manner that will improve and develop their teaching practice.
4. Approach to "At-risk" Students - A commitment made to teach every child despite societal conditions and believing it is their responsibility to spark their students' desire to learn.
5. Professional - Personal Orientation to Students - The realization that while they may not love every child, they are still responsible for teaching all children in their class. Star teachers expect to teach every child and expect their students to learn even if they cannot say they "love" every child.
6. Burnout/Response to Bureaucracy - An ability to recognize and act on the causes of teacher burnout and keep morale from becoming low.
7. Fallibility - An ability to accept their mistakes and the mistakes of others and to acknowledge problems of human relations.

Haberman's interview attempts to measure subjective qualities that are common to competent teachers. In "A Brief Review of the History and Development of the Urban Teacher Selection Interview," (Haberman, 1995),

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Haberman contends that urban teachers who possess these subjective qualities to a high degree are the same teachers whose students also perform well compared with the students of teachers who do not possess these qualities. He differentiates these teachers as Stars and Failures. The basic premise of the interview is that the teaching behavior of Stars can be distinguished from the teaching behavior of Failures.

Haberman's criteria for teacher effectiveness differ from that described by other researchers in two ways. First, mainstream teacher effectiveness research focuses on the observable, behavioral acts of teaching with less attention to the affective or personality characteristics of teachers. Second, Haberman's research has investigated the characteristics of urban teachers exclusively, whereas most studies on teacher effectiveness are not concerned with the demographics of the settings in which teachers work.

Attempts by others to employ Haberman's interview as a teacher selection tool or as a device for additional research on teacher effectiveness have also focused on teaching in urban settings. Empirical applications of the Haberman method in rural settings, particularly rural persistent poverty settings, are not reported in the literature. It should also be noted that research on Haberman's interview by independent investigators is limited and the information is conflicting, so no judgments can be made about its validity apart from what has been reported by Haberman himself.

In addition to the Urban Teacher Selection Interview (UTSI), Haberman has also devised a written pre-screener in an effort to eliminate applicants that

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would not be capable of passing the UTSI. The pre-screener is not a substitute for the interview itself, but rather it allows interviewers to separate participants into two groups consisting of those likely to pass the interview in person and those likely to fail. The pre-screener by design is to keep interviewers from interviewing more applicants than desired.

Overall, the literature on teacher effectiveness reveals little about the characteristics of highly effective teachers working in rural, poverty, settings. Khattri, Riley, & Kane (1997) pointed out in their report that, "A recent review of doctoral dissertations from 1989 to 1993 found only 11 dissertations identifying successful strategies for the retention of qualified personnel in rural schools, and no dissertations identifying successful strategies for the recruitment of qualified personnel in rural schools" (p. 91). Because of insufficient research, the preparation and selection of teachers for work in rural areas are not well-informed endeavors.

It could be argued that effective teaching is effective anywhere, which is a proposition presumed to be true by most teacher effectiveness researchers. This suggests that methods and criteria used to identify successful teachers in general could prove useful for gaining an understanding of the characteristics of effective teachers in rural poverty settings. Haberman's Urban Teacher Selection Interview has the potential for accomplishing this goal. It has the distinct advantage of being sensitive to the ability of teachers to succeed in the extraordinarily challenging conditions of poverty in urban schools, conditions that

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are also shared by teachers working in poverty stricken rural school environments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to document and describe teacher characteristics, using the Haberman Teacher Selection Interview, that are related to positive student outcomes in rural persistent poverty (RPP) settings. This was accomplished primarily by comparing student outcomes of teachers who passed the interview with those who failed it and describing the characteristic profiles of the two groups as revealed by the interviews. The student outcomes reviewed included scores on the Arkansas Benchmark exam for two years, rates of discipline referrals, and student absenteeism. A secondary purpose was to estimate the validity of the Haberman method for use in rural settings by determining whether, and to what extent, the student outcome measures are associated with scores on the seven dimensions of the Haberman interview.

Significance of the Study

Many rural schools are places where poverty is an undeniable fact of life. These schools are often plagued with aging facilities, poor attendance, low standardized test scores, plus large percentages of unemployed and uneducated parents who might not stress the significance of education. There is a need to place more effective or competent teachers in rural persistent poverty classrooms, especially since research has shown that students in poverty situations have a disproportionate share of poorly qualified teachers (Viadero, 2000). Despite these negatives, there are likely to be classrooms in the system

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where students are learning as measured by related gains on the Arkansas Benchmark exam, where there are a noticeable lack of discipline referrals, and a lower rate of absenteeism. Identifying the common characteristics of these competent teachers will provide the system with information, which can be used to recruit, hire, and develop more effective rural teachers.

Should rural teachers be identified as "Star Teachers" as evidenced by their interview results, standardized test scores, a noticeable lack of discipline referrals, and a lower rate of absenteeism, this interview could, after further study, be used to identify teachers who will be successful in the RPP setting. Further implications might also extend to teacher education programs and to the usage of alternative certification as a means of reducing teaching vacancies in poverty areas experiencing a teacher shortage.

Limitations and Delimitations

The following limitations and delimitations exist related to this study:

1. The study was limited by outcomes expressed as academic gains measured by the criterion referenced Arkansas Benchmark results for the years 2001 and 2002, and also by rates of discipline referrals, and absenteeism rates for only one academic year.
2. The criteria that defined effective teaching in this study was limited by the content, administration, and scoring of the Haberman Urban Teacher Selection Interview and corresponding screening questionnaire.
3. Results of this study may only be generalized to fourth grade teachers employed in rural poverty persistent school districts in Arkansas.

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4. Because the interview process was used with currently employed teachers, no conclusions may be inferred regarding its relative utility for selecting prospective teachers.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter describes literature relevant to this study. It is organized into four sections: (1) rural persistent poverty schools, (2) differences between urban educational settings and rural settings, (3) teacher effectiveness, and (4) Martin Haberman's interview and prescreening instrument.

Rural Persistent Poverty Settings

One problem facing rural education today is determining what is meant by the term, rural (Arnold, 2000; Fan & Chen, 1999; Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Hodgkinson, 1994; Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997). There are at least four different definitions of the rural geographic location used by government agencies such as the U.S. Bureau of Census, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, and the National Center for Education Statistics. An additional problem is that research studies conducted have employed different definitions of rural, making it difficult to compare results across studies (Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997).

Not only have researchers failed to use a common definition of rural, some even criticize the existing definitions (e.g., Hodgkinson, 1994). Hodgkinson indicates that the current definitions do not go far enough and asserts that other factors should be considered such as: the degree of isolation an area experiences, and the type(s) of employment found in a setting when defining if a location is rural.

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Current definitions of what constitutes a rural setting now being utilized are derived from the Beale codes, which defines an area as either metropolitan or nonmetropolitan according to county size. To qualify as rural according to the Beale codes, a place has to have a population of 2,500 but not more than 20,000. A common theme in defining rural according to the government is that rural is nonmetropolitan (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Hodgkinson, 1994). Other methods of defining rural include using the Metro Status codes, and/or the Locale codes, also known as the Johnson codes (AASA, 2001). In Arkansas, The Arkansas Rural Education Association's basic definition for rural includes all schools outside cities that have a population of 50,000 or more, but the organization opens membership to all public schools in the state (J. M. Edington, personal communication, March 7, 2001).

After determining if an area is rural or not based on definitions, these regions can be further divided into those that can be classified as rural persistent poverty (RPP) counties. These are places where life and education are challenged the most and where students are At-risk of failing. Rural persistent poverty counties are defined as those in which 20 percent or more of a total population have an income below the poverty level during a census year of 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990 (Carter, 1999; Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997).

It is important to note that rural schools comprised between 26.1 and 28.3 percent of all U.S. schools between 1990 and 1994 (Hodgkinson, 1994; Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997). A policy brief released in 2000 stated that according to the National Center for Education Statistics in 1999, roughly 6.5 million students

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